

AFANASY NIKITIN'S

VOYAGE BEYOND THREE SEAS









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Three Seas

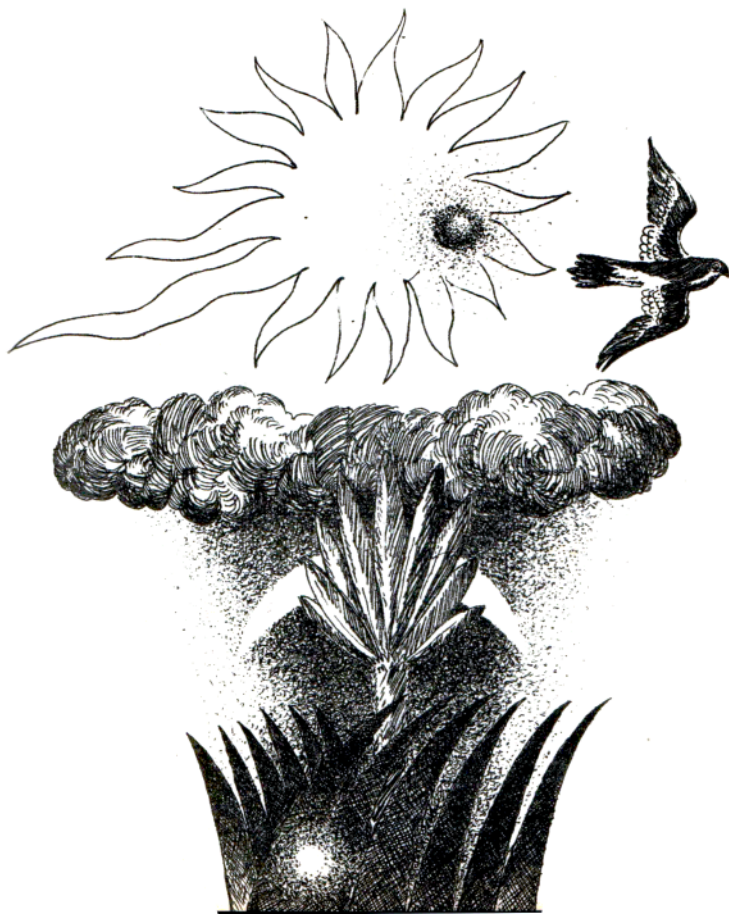




Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, Thy sinful servant **Afanasy**, son of Nikita.

I have described my sinful voyage beyond three seas, the **first** being the Sea of Derbent, or Sea of Khwalis¹, the second **the** Indian Sea, or Sea of Hindustan², and the third the Black **Sea**, or Sea of Stambul³.

I set forth down the Volga from the Golden-Domed Cathedral of the Redeemer⁴, from Grand Duke Mikhail Borisovich⁵ and from His Grace Gennady of Tver⁶. Upon arrival at Kalyazin, I received the blessing of Father-Superior **Macarius** and brethren of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity⁷ **and** the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb⁸; from Kalyazin I pro-



ceeded to Uglich, and from Uglich to Kostroma, to Prince Alexander, bearing another pass from the Grand Duke⁹, and he let me sail on unhampered. Nor was I hampered on my way to the city of Nizhny Novgorod, to Mikhail Kiselev, the Governor, and Ivan Sarayev, Keeper of the Tolls.

Vasily Papin¹⁰ had already passed on, and for a fortnight I had to await at Novgorod the arrival of Hasan Beg, the Tartar Shirvanshah's Ambassador. He was coming from Grand Duke Ivan with gerfalcons, of which he had ninety. And I proceeded with him down the Volga. We sailed freely past Kazan, the Horde, Uslan, Sarai¹¹, and Berekezan¹².

And we entered the River Buzan¹³. There we met three pagan Tartars, who gave us false tidings, saying that Khan Kasim¹⁴ with three thousand Tartars lay in wait for merchants down the river. Hasan Beg, the Shirvanshah's Ambas-



sador, gave each of the three a coat and a piece of linen in order that they might lead us safely past Astrakhan. They took the coats, but sent word to the tsar of Astrakhan. I left my ship and with my companions boarded the Ambassador's ship. The moon was shining as we were passing Astrakhan. The tsar sighted us, and the Tartars shouted to us: "Flee not!" But we did not hear, and sailed on. Then the tsar sent his whole horde in pursuit of us, and for our sins we were overtaken at Bugun¹⁵, the Tartars shot one of our men, and we shot two of theirs. Our small ship was stopped by a weir, they seized her and at once plundered her; and all my luggage was in that small ship.

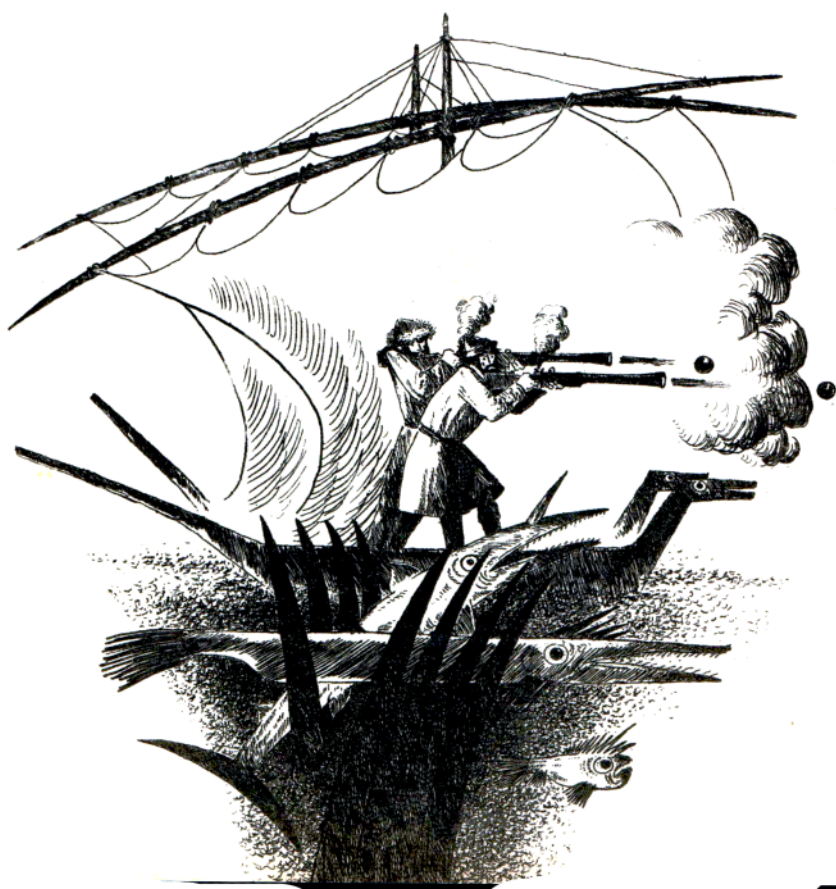
On the big ship we reached the sea, but ran aground in the mouth of the Volga. Thereupon the Tartars seized us and towed the ship back to the weir. There they took the big ship



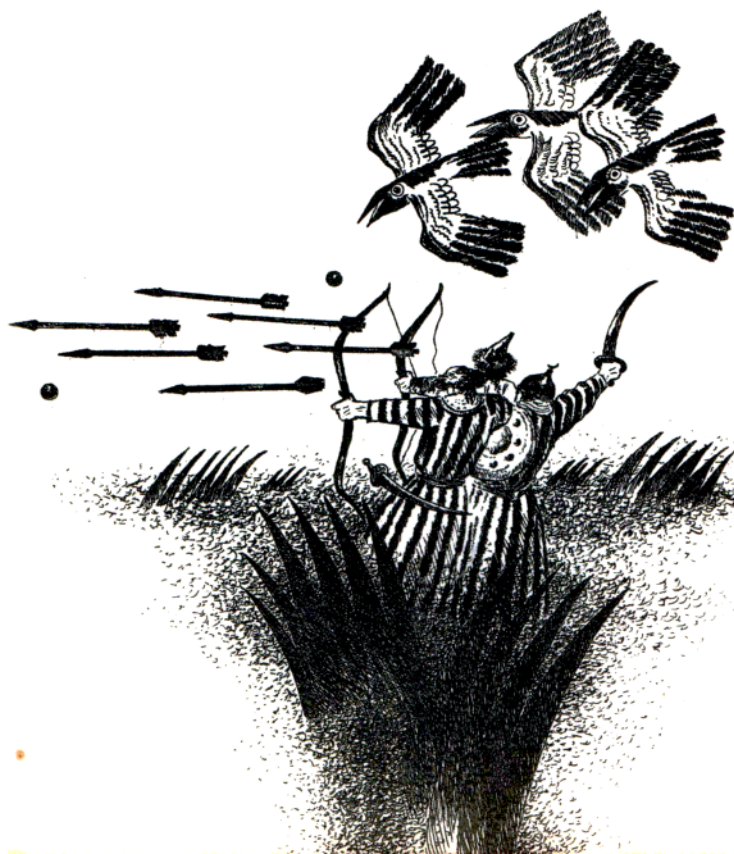
away from us, and led four Russians away captive; having robbed us, they let us proceed beyond the sea. They did not let us sail upstream lest we should send word.

And we headed for Derbent¹⁶ on two ships; on one of them sailed Hasan Beg, the Ambassador, with Iranians and us, the Russians, ten men in all, and the other ship carried six Muscovites and six men from Tver, as well as cows and victuals. A storm overtook us at sea. The smaller ship was smashed against the coast near the little town of Tarki¹⁷, and the men went ashore; then came some Kaitaks¹⁸, and made captives of them all.

Upon reaching Derbent, we learnt that Vasily Papin had arrived safe and sound, while we had been robbed. And I humbly begged him and Hasan Beg, the Shirvanshah's Ambassador, with whom we had arrived, to plead for the men



seized by the Kaitaks near Tarki. And Hasan Beg solicited for them; he went to Bulat Beg, who dispatched a runner to Shirvanshah Beg with the message that a Russian ship had been wrecked off Tarki and that some Kaitaks had taken her men captive and stolen their goods. And Shirvanshah Beg at once sent a man to his brother-in-law Khalil Beg, Prince of Kaitaks, to tell him this: "My ship has been wrecked off Tarki, and your men have come and taken the men captive and stolen their goods, and will you for my sake send the men to me and have their goods recovered, because those men have been sent to me; and if you want something of me, send for it and I shall not refuse you, my brother, only let them free for my sake." And Khalil Beg at once released and sent all the men to Derbent, whence they were sent to the Shirvanshah's camp.



We, too, went to the Shirvanshah's camp, and humbly begged him to grant us the wherewithal to reach Rus. But he did not give us anything because we were many. And we wept and dispersed; those of us who owned something in Rus left for Rus, and those who had debts there went wherever they could; some remained at Shemakha¹⁹, while others went to work at Baku.

As for me, I went to Derbent, and from Derbent to Baku, where an eternal fire is burning; and from Baku I crossed the sea to Chapakur²⁰, where I lived for six months; then I lived at Sari²¹, in the Mazanderan country, for a month. Thence I proceeded to Amul²², where I lived for a month, thence to Demavend²³, and from Demavend to Rai²⁴. There Shah Husain, son of Ali and grandson of Mohammed, was slain; he



cursed them, and by his curse 70 towns were felled. And from Rai I journeyed to Kashan²⁵, where I stayed for a month, thence to Nain²⁵, and from Nain to Yezd, where I also lived for a month. And from Yezd I proceeded to Sirjan²⁵ and thence to Tarum²⁵, where cattle are fed with dates bought at four *altins* a *batman*²⁶. And from Tarum I journeyed to Lar²⁷, and from Lar to Bandar²⁸. And that is where the harbour of Hormuz²⁹ is, as well as the Indian Sea, called Sea of Hindustan in Persian. And from Bandar it is four miles by sea to Hormuz.

And Hormuz lies on an island which is flooded by the sea twice a day. There I kept my first Easter, having arrived four weeks before the feast.

I have not above listed all the cities, for there are many



more great cities. The sun at Hormuz is blazing-hot, and may burn one. I stayed there for a month, and in the first week after Easter I sailed across the Indian Sea on a *dabba*³⁰ with horses.

And it took us 10 days to sail by sea to Muscat³¹, and four days to sail from Muscat to Dega³². From Dega we sailed to Gujarat, and thence to Cambay³³, where there are indigo and lac, and from Cambay to Chaul³⁴. We left Chaul in the seventh week after Easter, having reached it on the *dabba* in six weeks.

And that is where the land of India lies, and where everyone goes naked; the women go bareheaded and with breasts uncovered, their hair plaited into one braid. Many women are with child, they bear children every year, and



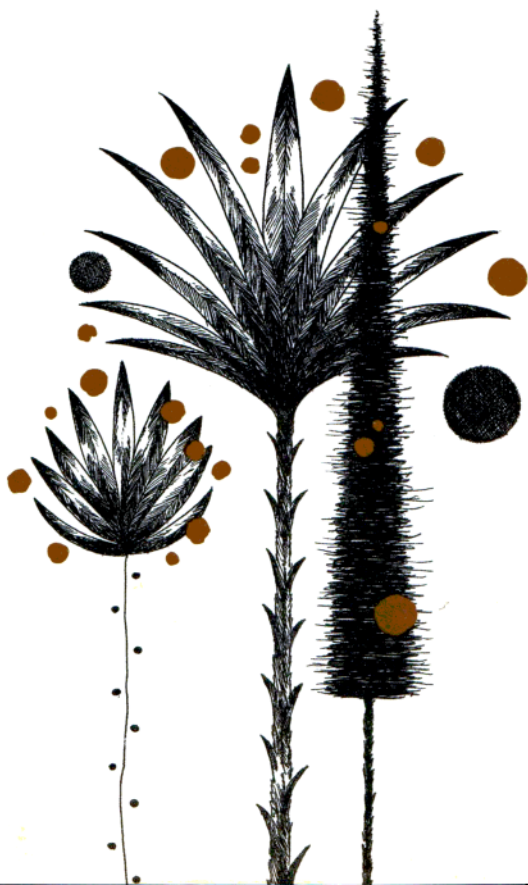
have many children. The men and women are all dark. Wherever I went I was followed by many people who wondered at a white man.

And their prince wears a dhoti upon his head and another about his loins; their boyars wear a dhoti round their shoulders and another about their loins; their princesses wrap a dhoti round their shoulders and another round their loins. As for the servants of the prince and the boyars, they wear a dhoti wound about their loins, and carry shield and sword in their hands, while others have spears or knives or sabres, or bow and arrows. And all are naked and barefoot, and strong. And the women go bareheaded and with breasts uncovered; as for the little boys and girls, they go naked till the age of seven, and do not hide their private parts.



From Chaul it took us eight days by land to get to Pali³⁵; both are Indian towns; and from Pali to Umra, another Indian town, it is 10 days, and from Umra to Junnar³⁶, six days. And at Junnar there lives the Indian Asad Khan³⁷, a servant of Malik-at-Tujjâr³⁷; they say he has 70,000 men from Malik-at-Tujjâr. And Malik-at-Tujjâr has 200,000; for 20 years he has been fighting *kâfirs*³⁸; sometimes they beat him, but he beats them oftener. The Khan rides on men; he has many elephants and fine horses. He also has many men of Khorassan, who are brought from the land of Khorassan³⁹ or Arabia, or from the Turkoman land, and from Jagatai⁴⁰. They are always brought by sea in *dabbas*, which are Indian ships.

And I, a sinful man, brought a stallion to the land of India. Thank God, I reached Junnar in good health—the passage



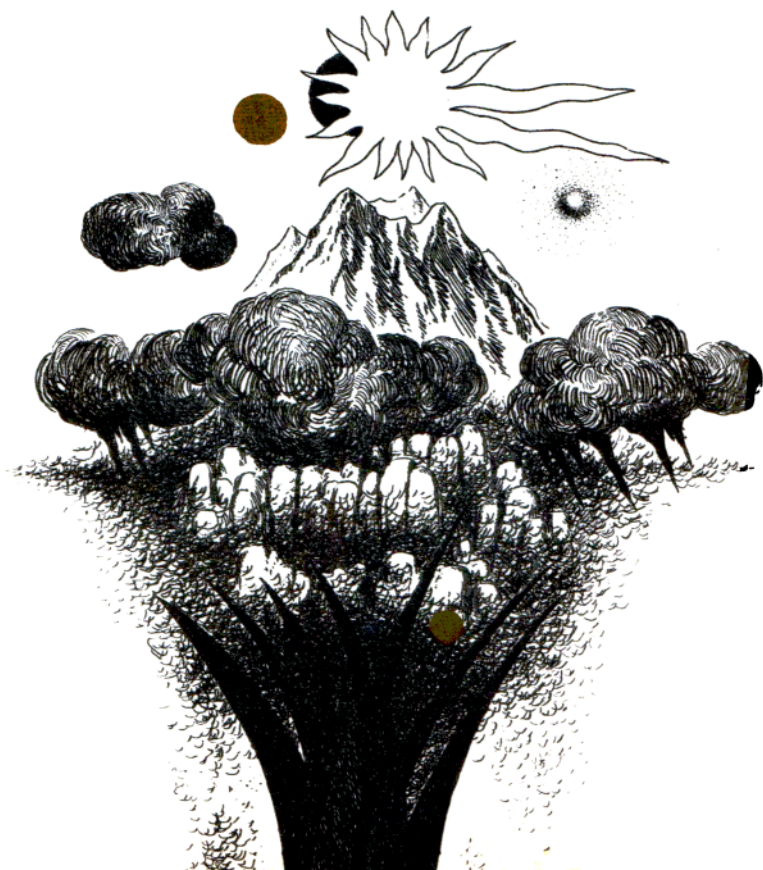
cost me a hundred rubles. The winter there set in on Trinity Sunday, and we spent it at Junnar, where we lived for two months; throughout four months there was water and mud everywhere, both by day and at night. That is the season of ploughing and of sowing wheat and rice and pulse, and all the other crops. Wine is made in big coconuts, and beer is brewed from *tatna*⁴¹. Horses are fed with pulse, and *kbichri*⁴² with sugar and ghee is made for them; early in the morning they are also fed with rice cakes. No horses are bred in India, but oxen and buffaloes are. They are used for carrying persons and sometimes goods—they serve all purposes.

The town of Junnar lies on a rocky island not built by man but created by God. It takes a whole day's uphill walk to go there, the path is narrow and two people cannot pass.



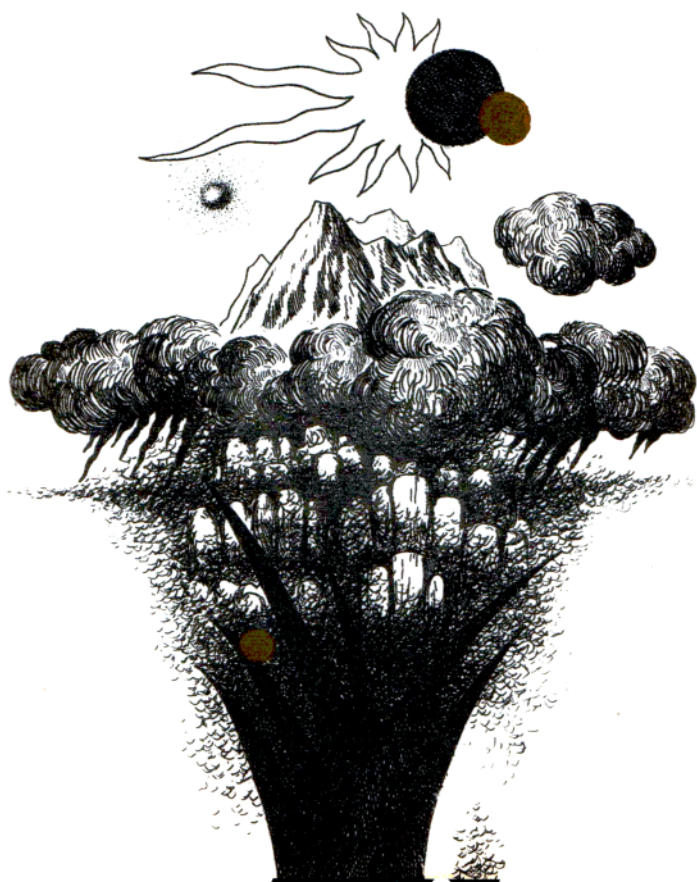
In India travellers put up at inns, and the food is cooked for them by women, who also make the guests' beds. In winter people there wear a dhoti round their loins, another about their shoulders, and third round their heads. As for the princes and boyars, in that season they put on trousers, a shirt, and a caftan; they also wrap a dhoti about their shoulders, girdle themselves with another, and wind a third round their heads.

And there at Junnar the Khan took away my stallion. But when he learnt that I was a Russian and not a Moslem, he said: "I shall give thee back thy stallion and pay thee a thousand pieces of gold, if only thou wilt adopt our Mohammedan faith. But shouldst thou not adopt our Mohammedan faith, I shall keep the stallion and exact a ransom of a thousand



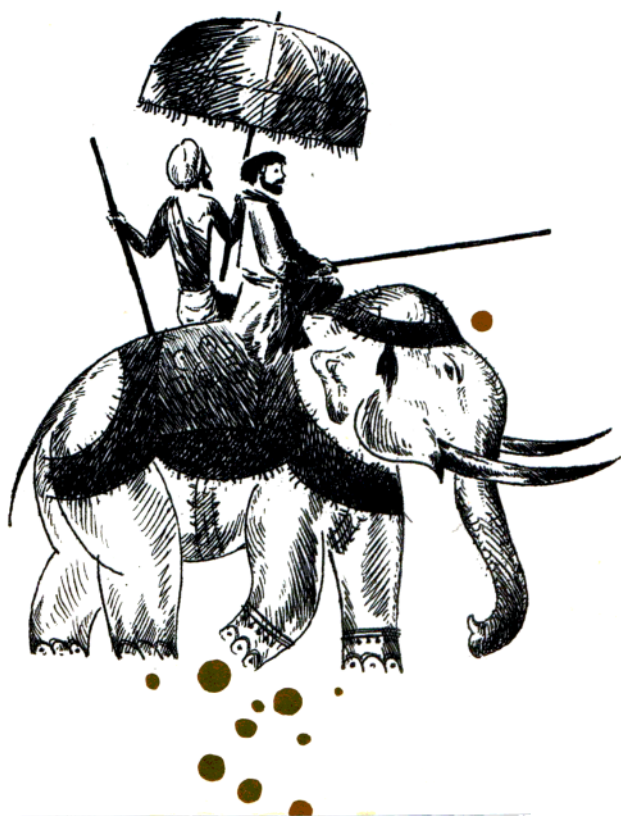
pieces of gold from thee." And he gave me four days—till Our Redeemer's Day, during the Fast of the Holy Mother of God. And the Lord had mercy upon me on His holy day, He kept not His mercy from me, miserable sinner, and left me not to perish at Junnar among the godless. Khoja Muhammad of Khorassan arrived on the eve of Our Redeemer's Day, and I humbly begged him to plead for me. And he rode to the Khan in town, and persuaded him not to convert me to his faith; he also took back my stallion. Such was the wonder wrought by the Lord on Our Redeemer's Day. And so, my Christian brothers of Rus, those of you who want to go to the land of India must leave their faith in Rus and invoke Mohammed before setting out for the land of Hindustan.

I was deceived by Moslems; they had told me of an abun-



dance of goods, but I found that there was nothing for our land. All toll-free goods are for the Moslem land only. Pepper and dyes are cheap. Some carry their goods by sea, others pay no toll for them. But we shall not be allowed to take our goods free of toll. And the toll is high and, moreover, there are many pirates at sea. And all the pirates are pagans, not Christians or Moslems; they worship stone idols, and are ignorant of Christ.

And we left Junnar on the Day of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God for Bidar⁴³, a big city, and it took us a month to arrive there; and from Bidar it is five days to Kulungir⁴³, and as much from Kulungir to Gulbarga⁴³. There are many other towns between these three big ones; every day we passed through three towns, and sometimes even four; there are as many towns as there are *kos*⁴⁴. From Chaul



to Junnar it is 20 *kos*, and from Junnar to Bidar 40 *kos*, and from Bidar to Kulungir 9 *kos*, and from Bidar to Gulbarga, also 9 *kos*.

At Bidar, horses and various goods are sold: brocade, silk, and all kinds of other goods; black people, too, are on sale there. Nothing else is sold. And all the goods come from Hindustan. As for food, nothing is sold but vegetables. There are no goods for the land of Rus.

All the Indian princes come of Khorassan, and so do all the boyars. And all the people of Hindustan go on foot and walk fast, and are all naked and barefoot; they carry a shield in one hand and a sword in the other. Some of the servants have long, straight bows and arrows. And they always fight mounted on elephants, sending the footmen forward, while the Khorassanis ride on horseback, both they and their



horses clad in armour. As for the elephants, long hammered swords are tied to their trunks and tusks, each weighing a kantar; they wear steel armour, and carry castles upon their backs; and in each castle there are 12 men in armour, with cannons and arrows.

There is a place—the tomb of Sheik Ala-uddin at Alland⁴⁵—where a fair is held once a year, and whither people from all the Indian country come to trade for 10 days. It is 12 *kos* from Bidar. Horses are brought thither for sale, as many as 20,000 head, and all kinds of other goods, too. It is the best fair in the land of Hindustan; all wares are sold or bought there in memory of Sheik Ala-uddin, during the Russian Feast of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God⁴⁶. At Alland there lives the ghuggû; whenever it settles on a



house-top, someone dies in the house; and when anyone tries to kill it, it begins to spit fire. *Mamons* prowl at night, catching fowl; they dwell in the mountains or upon rocks. As for monkeys, they live in the woods; and they have a monkey prince who leads an army. And when anyone harms them, they complain to their prince, who sets his army upon the offender. Then the monkeys fall upon that town and destroy the houses and kill the people. They are said to have a very large army and to speak a tongue of their own; they give birth to many young, but the young that are not like their father or mother are left on the roads. Then people of Hindustan pick them up and teach them sundry handicrafts, but some of them they sell, doing it at night lest they should flee back, and some they teach how to imitate players.



Spring came with the Feast of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God; it is in spring, a fortnight after Intercession, that an eight-day feast is kept to honour the memory of Sheik Ala-uddin. Spring, summer, winter, and autumn last three months each.

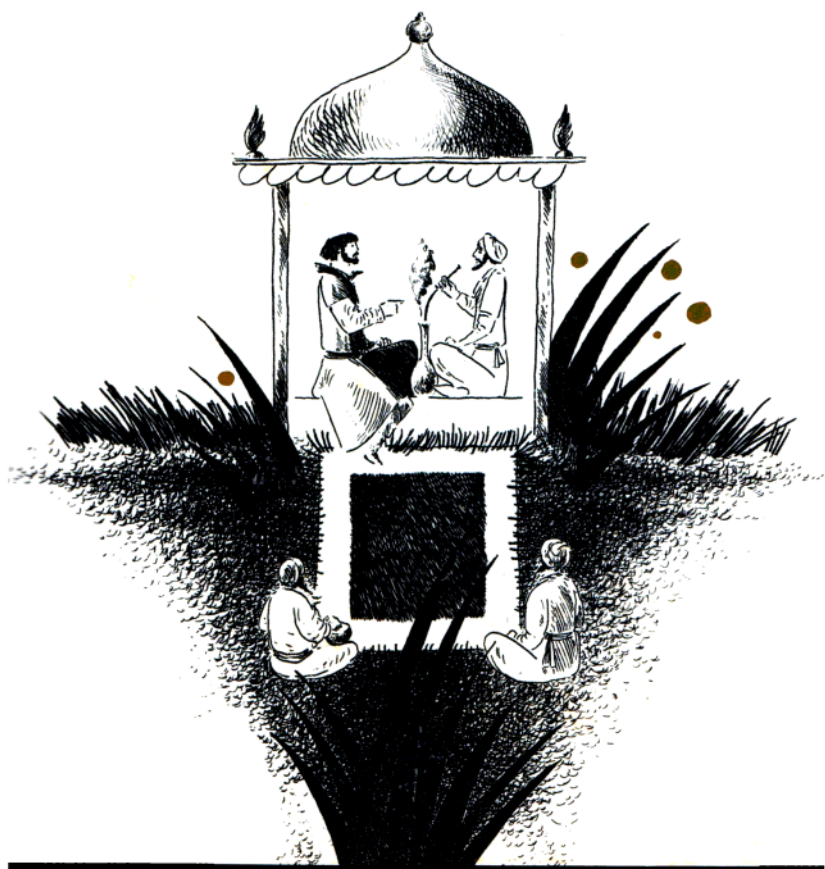
And Bidar is the capital of Moslem Hindustan⁴⁷. It is a large city, and many people live in it. The Sultan is young—only 20 years old—and princes and boyars of Khorassan govern the land; Khorassanis, too, fight in wars.

In that city there lives Malik-at-Tujjâr, a boyar who has an army 200,000 strong. Melik Khan⁴⁸ has 100,000 and Far-khad Khan⁴⁸, 20,000. And many khans have an army of 10,000 each. The Sultan goes to war with an army of 300,000. The land is very populous; the countrymen are



very poor, but the boyars are rich and live in luxury; they are carried in silver litters, preceded by as many as 20 horses in golden harness and followed by 300 horsemen, 500 foot soldiers, 10 trumpeters, 10 drummers, and 10 pipers. And the Sultan goes forth with his mother and wife to amuse himself, and is accompanied by 10,000 horsemen and 50,000 foot soldiers. And there also go forth 200 elephants in gilt armour. And the Sultan is preceded by 100 trumpeters, 100 dancers, and 300 spare horses in golden harness, and followed by 100 monkeys and 100 *gaurikâs*, all young maidens.

The Sultan's palace has seven gates, with a hundred guards and a hundred *kâfir* scribes at each gate; some of them register those coming in and others, those going out; but strangers are barred from the palace. And the palace is



very handsome, with fretwork and gilt all over it, and its every stone is carved and very beautifully painted in gold; and inside the palace there are sundry vessels.

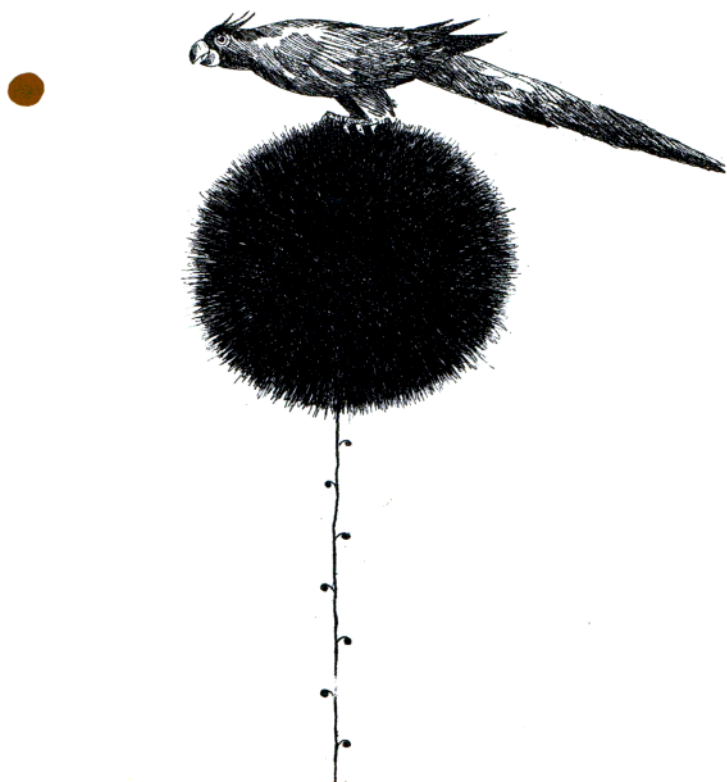
A thousand men posted by the Governor guard the city of Bidar by night; they are mounted, wear armour, and carry torches. I sold my stallion at Bidar; I had been keeping it for a year, and had spent 68 fanams on it. Snakes fourteen feet long crawl along the streets of Bidar. I arrived at Bidar from Kulungir during the Fast of Advent⁴⁹, and sold my stallion on Christmas Day.

And I stayed at Bidar till Lent. There I came to know many Hindus and told them that I was a Christian and not a Moslem, and that my name was Afanasy, or Khoja Yusuf Khorasani⁵⁰ in the Moslem tongue. They did not hide from me when eating, trading, praying, or doing something else; nor did they conceal their wives.



I asked them questions about their faith, and they said to me: "We believe in Adam, and the *butr*⁵¹, they say, are Adam and his whole kin." Altogether there are eighty-four⁵² faiths in India, and everyone believes in *But*. People of different faiths do not eat or drink together, nor do they intermarry; some eat mutton, fowl, fish, and eggs, but of no faith do the people eat beef.

I spent four months at Bidar, and agreed with some Indians to go to Parvat⁵³, their Jerusalem, or Mecca in the Moslem tongue, where stands their chief *butkbanab* (idol-house). It took us a month to reach the *butkbanab*. The market by the *butkbanab* lasts for five days. And the *butkbanab* is very large—half the size of Tver—and is built of stone in which the deeds of *But* are carved; in all there are 12 tiers of carvings that show *But* working wonders, or appearing before Indians in many shapes; first, in the shape of a man; second, of



a man with an elephant's trunk; third, of an ape-like man; fourth, of a man having the form of a ferocious beast. He always appeared before them with a tail, and his tail, which is carved in stone, is seven feet long. People from all over the land of India come together at the *butkbanah* to see *But*'s miracles. Near the *butkbanah*, old wives and young maidens shave all their hair; men shave their beards and heads too. Thereupon they go to the *butkbanah*; each has to pay a fee of two *sheshkanis*⁵⁴ for the benefit of *But*, and horses are charged four fanams each. The number of those who gather at the *butkbanah* is 20,000, and sometimes even as much as 100,000. In the *butkbanah*, *But* is carved in stone, and is very big indeed; his tail is slung over his shoulder, and his right arm is raised high and stretched out like the Emperor Justin-



ian's at Constantinople⁵⁵, while in his left hand he holds a spear; and he wears no clothing, save that his buttocks are wrapped in a cloth; his face is that of an ape. And the other *buts* are stark naked, they wear nothing, and their buttocks are uncovered; and *But's* wives are carved naked, with all their parts, and with children. And before *But* stands a huge ox hewn of black stone and gilt all over. They kiss the ox on the hoof and strew flowers upon it; *But*, too, is strewn with flowers.

The Indians eat no flesh at all—no beef, mutton, fowl, fish, or pork, although they have a great many pigs. They have two meals a day, and eat nothing at night; they drink neither wine nor mead. They do not eat or drink with Moslems. Their food is poor, and they do not eat or drink with



one another, not even with their wives. They eat rice and *kbichri* with ghee, and various herbs, which they boil in ghee and milk. And they eat everything with their right hand, never touching any food with their left; they never use a knife, and have no spoons. When journeying, each carries a pot to boil food in. And they hid from Moslems lest they should look into the pot or at the food. And should a Moslem look at the food, the Indian will not eat it. When eating, some cover themselves with a shawl, so that no one may see them.

And they pray facing eastwards, in the Russian manner; they raise high both hands and put them on their crown, and lie face downwards on the ground and stretch out on it—that is how they worship. And when they sit down to take a



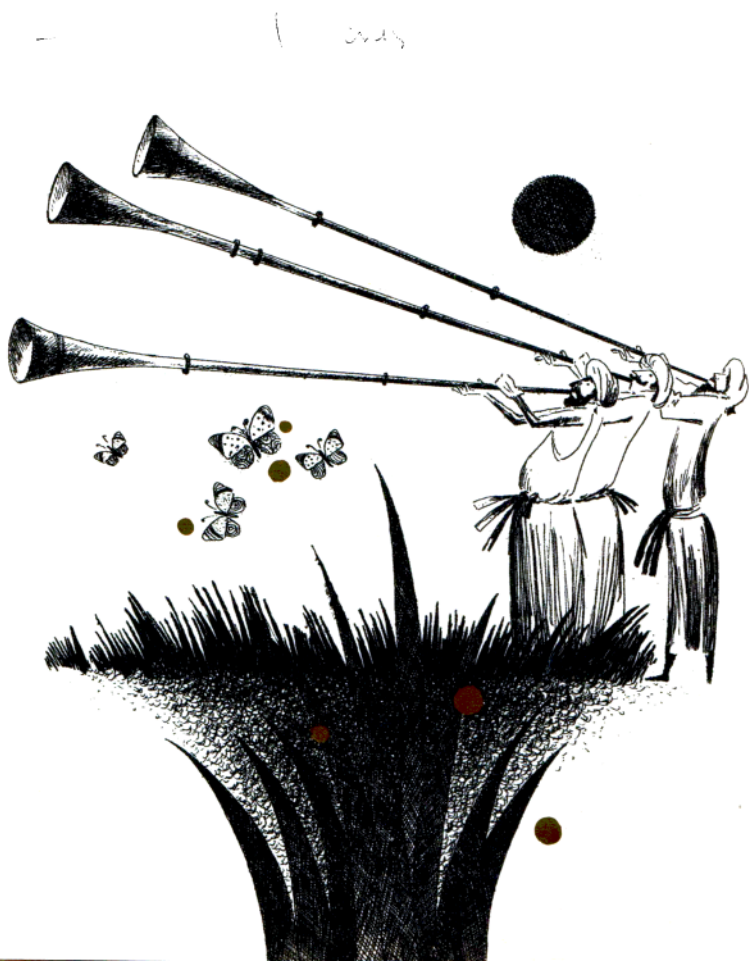
meal, some wash their hands and feet, and also rinse their mouths. Their *butkbanabs* have no doors, and face eastwards; the *buts*, too, stand facing eastwards. And when someone dies, they burn him and scatter the ashes over water. And when a woman gives birth to a child, it is her husband who midwifes her; a son is named by the father, and a daughter by the mother. In coming or going, they bow after the fashion of monks, touching the ground with both hands and saying nothing.

They go to Parvat at Lent to worship their *But*; that is their Jerusalem, or Mecca in the Moslem tongue. And they all arrive naked, with but a cloth round their buttocks; the women are naked, too, save for a dhoti about their buttocks; some wear dhotis and pearl necklaces and many sapphires and also



gold bracelets and rings, in faith they do. And they go to the *bütkebanah* astride on oxen, and each ox has its horns encased in brass, and wears about 300 bells round its neck, and has its hoofs shod. And those oxen are called "fathers". The Indians call the ox "father" and the cow, "mother"; they use the dung as fuel to bake bread and cook their food, and smear their faces, foreheads, and bodies with the ashes. That is their sign. On Sundays and Mondays, they have one meal, by day.

From Parvat I came to Bidar a fortnight before *Ulu Bayram*, the great Moslem feast⁵⁶. And I know not when Easter Sunday, the great day of the Resurrection of Christ, occurs, so I try to guess by signs: with the Christians, Easter comes nine or ten days before the Moslem *Bayram*. I have nothing with



me—no book; we took books with us from Rus, but when I was robbed the books were seized too. And I have forgotten all that I knew of the Christian faith and all the Christian feasts; I know not when Easter occurs, or Christmas, or Wednesday or Friday. And surrounded by other faiths, I pray to God that He may protect me: "O Lord God, God of truth, O Thou that art merciful, God my Creator, Thou art my Lord. There is one God, the Prince of Glory, Maker of heaven and earth."

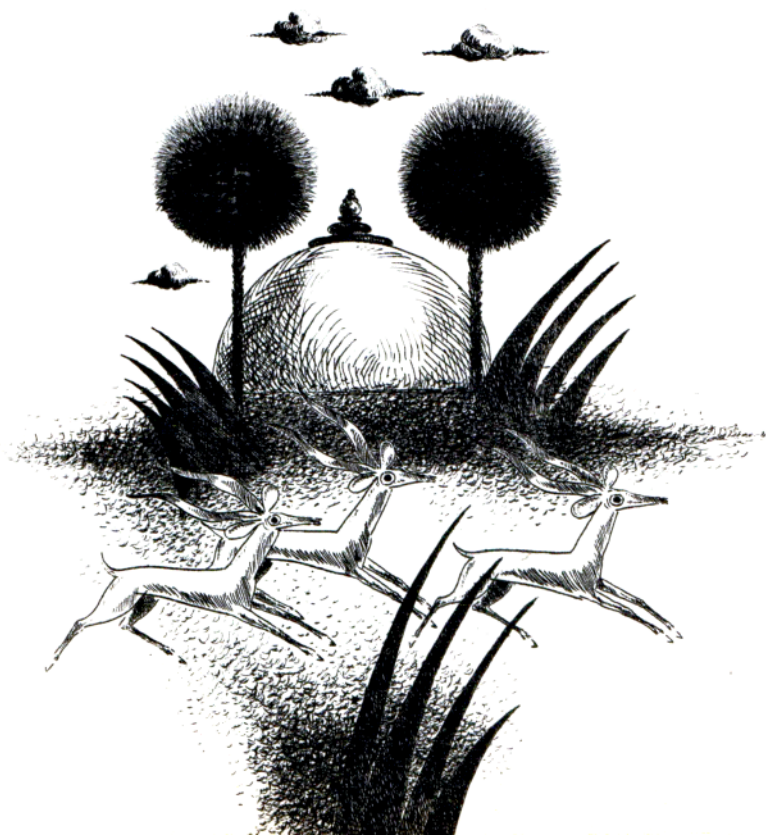
And I am going back to Rus thinking that my faith is dead, for I have fasted with the Moslems. The month of March has passed, and for a month I have not been eating any meat, fasting with the Moslems and eating nothing fat, no Moslem food, and taking two meals a day—nothing but bread and



water. And I have prayed to God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and have invoked none but His name: the God who made us, the merciful God, God Almighty.

And it is 10 days by sea from Hormuz to Kalhat, and 6 days from Kalhat to Dega, and 6 days from Dega to Muscat, and 10 days from Muscat to Gujarat, and 4 days from Gujarat to Cambay, and 12 days from Cambay to Chaul, and 6 days from Chaul to Dabhol.⁵⁷ As for Dabhol, it is a harbour in Hindustan, the last of the Moslem harbours.

And it takes 25 days to go from Dabhol to Calicut⁵⁸, and 15 days from Calicut to Ceylon, and a month from Ceylon to Shabait⁵⁹, and 20 days from Shabait to Pegu⁶⁰, and a month from Pegu to Chin and Machin⁶¹. And these are all sea voyages. And from Chin to Cathay⁶² it is six months' journey by



land and four days' sail by sea. May God adorn my shelter.

Hormuz is a great harbour. People from all over the world arrive there, and all kinds of goods are sold in its market. Whatever is produced on earth can be had at Hormuz. The toll, however, is high—one-tenth of everything.

And Cambay is a harbour whence ships sail all over the Indian Sea, and it is rich in goods; *alacha*⁶³, taffeta, coarse cloth, and indigo are made there, and also lac, cornelian, and clove. Dabhol is a very big harbour, and horses are brought thither from Egypt, Arabia, Khorassan, Turkestan, and Old Hormuz; and it is a month's journey by land to Bidar and to Gulbarga.

And Calicut is a big harbour on the Indian Sea, and God forbid that any ship should pass by it; no one who sails past it



will cross the sea unscathed. And it produces pepper, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, clove, spices, *adrak*⁶⁴, and many kinds of herb. And everything is cheap there; and slaves are very good; they are black.

And Ceylon is quite a big harbour on the Indian Sea, and there Father Adam stood on a high mountain⁶⁵. And near Ceylon precious stones, rubies, rock crystal, agates, amber, beryls, and emery are found. Elephants are bred there, and are sold by the cubit, and ostriches, which are sold by weight.

And the harbour of Shabait on the Indian Sea is very large. There the Khorassanis are paid a salary of one *tanga*⁶⁶ a day each, both the big and the little. And when a Khorassani marries there, he is granted one thousand *tangas* by the Prince of Shabait, who, moreover, pays him 10 *tangas* a month by way of wages, and as much for food. And at Sha-



bait there are silk and sandalwood and pearls, and it is all cheap.

The harbour of Pegu is not small, and it is mostly Indian dervishes that live there. And there one finds precious stones—*mâniks* and sapphires and rubies. These stones are sold by dervishes. And the harbours of *Chin* and *Machin* are very large, and there porcelain is made, and sold by weight at a low price.

It is three months from Bidar to Shabait, and two months from Dabhol to Shabait, by sea. And *Chin* and *Machin* is four months by sea from Bidar. And there porcelain is made, and everything is cheap. And it takes two months to reach Ceylon by sea. And in Shabait one finds silk and pearls and sandalwood; elephants are sold by the cubit.

In Ceylon there are monkeys, rubies, and crystals, and at



Calicut, pepper, nutmeg, clove, areca nuts, and dyes. In Gujarat there are indigo and lac and at Cambay, cornelian. At Rai-chur⁶⁷ diamonds are mined—old and new ones; one *pochka*⁶⁸ of diamond is sold at five rubles, and if very good, at 10 rubles; one *pochka* of new diamond, however, is worth only five *kanis*⁶⁹, one of blackish colour, from four to six *kanis*, and a white diamond, one *tanga*. Diamonds are mined in a rocky mountain, which is sold at 2,000 gold pounds a cubit if the diamonds are new, or at 10,000 gold pounds if they are old. And the land belongs to Melik Khan, a servant of the Sultan; and it is 30 *kos* from Bidar.

And the Jews hold Shabait to be their own, but that is a lie. The Shabaitans are not Jews, Moslems, or Christians; they have a different faith, the Hindu faith. They do not eat or

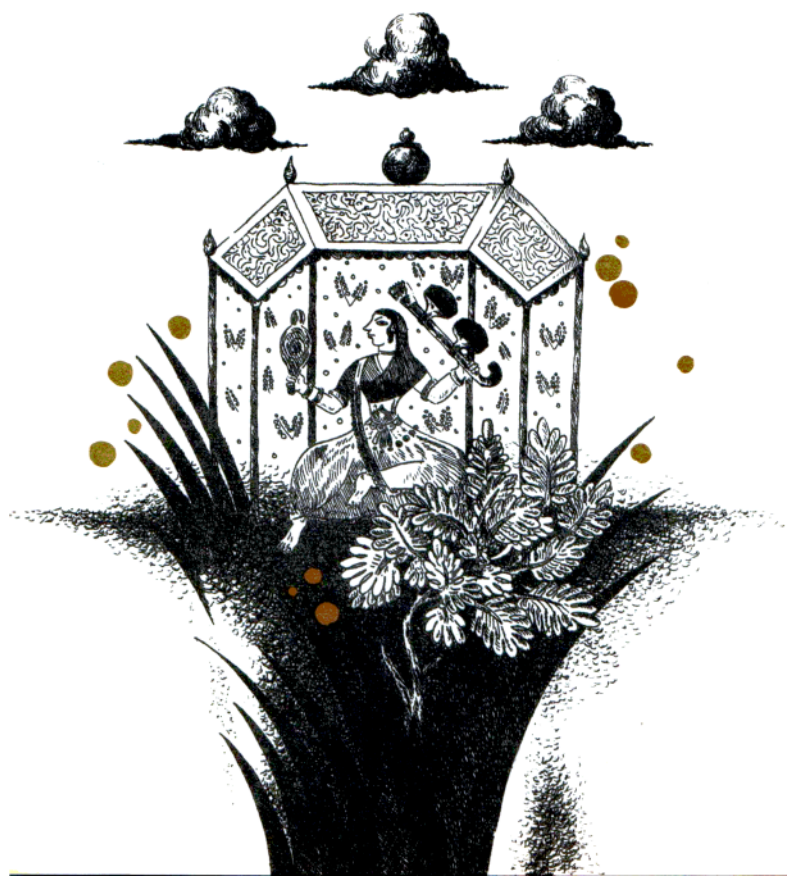


drink with Hebrews or Moslems, nor do they eat any meat. Everything is cheap in Shabait, and silk and sugar are made there—very cheap. And in the woods there one finds wild cats and monkeys, and they attack people on the roads, so that, because of the monkeys and wild cats, no one dares journey at night.

And from Shabait to Cathay it is 10 months by land, and four months by sea, on a big ship.

The navels of fattened deer are cut off because there is musk in them. But wild deer shed their navels in the fields or woods, and the navels give off an aroma which, however, is not so fragrant because they are not so fresh.

In the month of May, I kept Easter at Moslem Bidar, in Hindustan. And the Moslems kept *Bayram* on a Wednesday



in the month of May; and I had begun to fast on the first day of the month of April. O faithful Christians, those who voyage to many lands fall oft into sin, and rob themselves of their Christian faith. And I Afanasy, servant of the Lord, have been yearning for my faith with all my heart; Lent and Easter have already passed four times, and yet I, sinner that I am, know not when Easter or Lent or Christmas or any other holy day comes, nor do I know when it is Wednesday or Friday. And I have no books, for when I was robbed, all my books were taken away from me. And because of the many misfortunes I went to India, for I had nothing to take to Rus, no goods being left. The first Easter Sunday found me at Kain⁷⁰, the second at Chapakur, in the Mazanderan country, the third at Hormuz, and the fourth at Bidar, in India, with



Moslems. And there I shed many tears for the Christian faith.

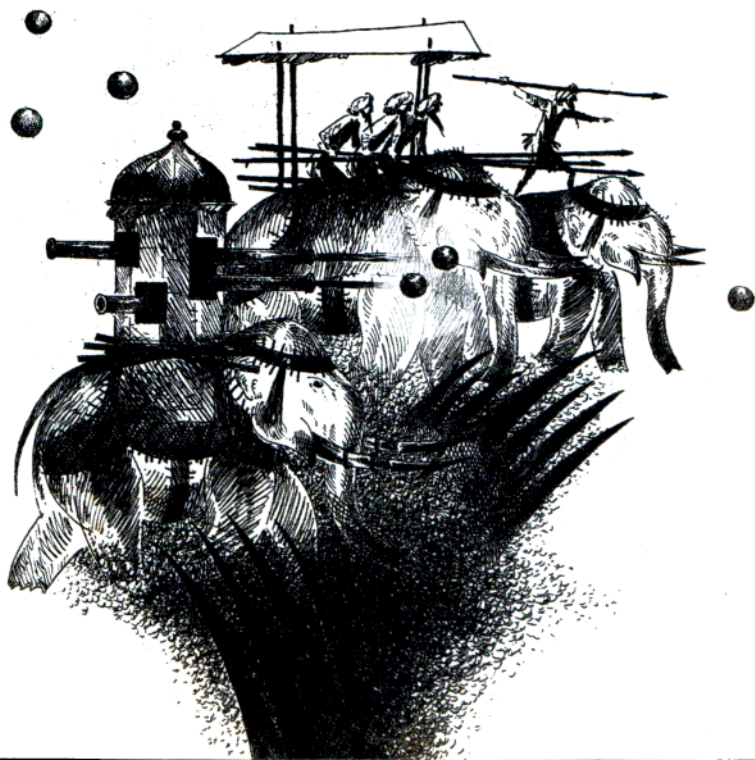
Melik the Moslem pressed me to adopt the Moslem faith. But I answered him: "My lord, you perform your prayers, and I perform mine; you say five prayers, and I say three; I am a stranger, but you are not." But he said to me: "Indeed, albeit thou professest not to be a Moslem, neither dost thou know the Christian faith." And then I thought it over a great deal, and said to myself: "Woe to me, miserable sinner, for I have strayed from the true path and knowing no other, must go my ways. Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, turn not Thy face from Thy servant who sorrows. Shelter me and have mercy upon me, O God who created me; lead me not a-stray, O Lord, from the path of righteousness, but keep me in



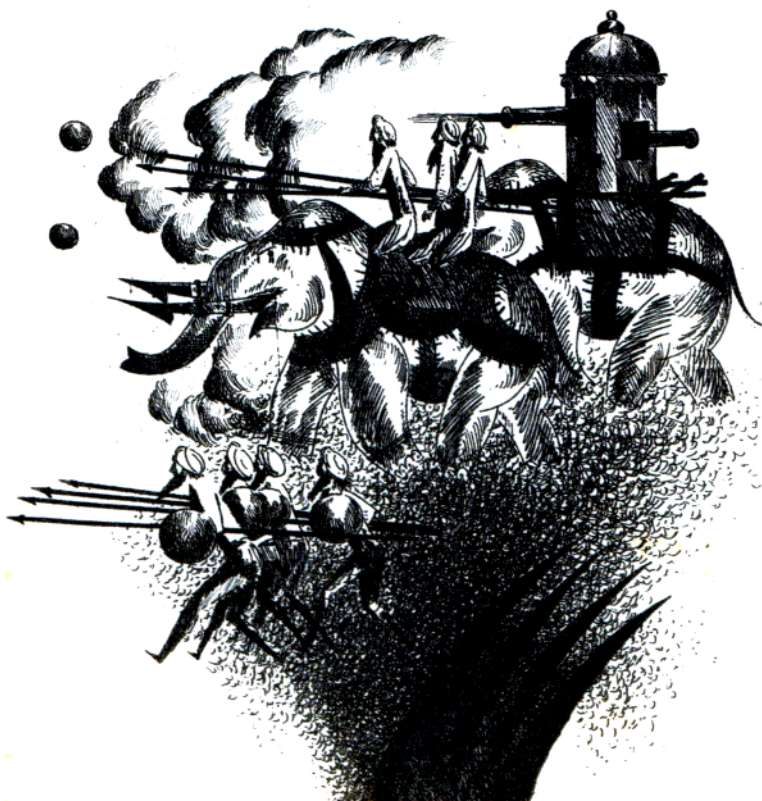
Thy true ways, for I have of necessity done nothing virtuous for Thy sake in my distress, and have lived all my days in evil. Four Easter Sundays have already passed in the Moslem land, but I have not forsaken the Christian faith; and God knows what may yet happen. In Thee I trust, O Lord, save me, O God!"

In Moslem India, at great Bidar, I watched the heavens on Easter night; the Pleiades and Orion stood low at Easter, and the Great Bear was headed eastwards.

During the Moslem *Bayram*, the Sultan went forth in procession, and was accompanied by 20 grand viziers and 300 elephants clad in steel armour and carrying castles encased in metal. And in each castle there were six men in armour, with cannons and harquebuses, and the biggest elephant carried 12 men. Each elephant bore two large



standards, and had long swords tied to its tusks, each sword weighing a kantar, and heavy iron weights fastened to its trunk; and between its ears sat a man in armour, who drove it with a big iron hook. And there also went 1000 spare horses in golden harness and 100 camels with drummers, and 300 trumpeters and 300 dancers and 300 slave girls. And the Sultan wore a caftan studded with sapphires, and a helmet with a huge diamond on the top; and his *sagadak*⁷¹ was adorned with sapphires, and he had three sabres in gold scabbards, and a golden saddle. And a *kâfir* ran before him, juggling with an umbrella, and after him came many footmen. He was also followed by a trained elephant clad in damask, with a big iron chain in its mouth, with which it struck at people and horses to keep them away from the Sultan. And the Sultan's brother was borne in a golden litter, and



above him was a velvet canopy, with a golden top set with sapphires. And the litter was carried by 20 men. And the Sovereign was borne in a golden litter, under a silk canopy with a golden top. His litter was mounted on four horses in golden harness. And he was surrounded by a great throng, and preceded by singers and many dancers. And all had bared swords or sabres, and shields and spears and bows, long and straight; and all the horses were in armour, and bore *sagadaks*. And some people went naked save for a loin-cloth.

At Bidar, the full moon lasts for three days. And there are no sweet vegetables there. The heat is not strong in Hindustan; it is strong at Hormuz and in Bahrein⁷², where pearls are found, and also in Jidda⁷³ and Baku and Egypt and Arabia



and Lar. It is hot in the land of Khorassan, too, but not so hot. And it is very hot in Jagatai. And it is hot in Shiraz and Yezd and Kashan, but a wind blows there at times. And in Gilan⁷⁴ the heat is very great and sweltering, and in Shem-akha it is sweltering too. It is hot at Babylon (Baghdad), and also at Homs⁷⁵ and Damascus. But it is not so hot at Aleppo. And at Sivas⁷⁶ and in the land of Georgia everything is most plentiful. And the Turkish land is very plentiful. Walachia⁷⁷ is plentiful too, and all food is cheap there. The land of Podolia⁷⁸, too, abounds in everything. May God protect the Russian land! There is no land in the world like it, although the boyars in the Russian land are unjust. May the Russian land be well-ordered, and may there be justice there.

In Thee I trust, O God, save me, O Lord! I know not my



way. Whither shall I go from Hindustan? If I go to Hormuz, there is no passage from Hormuz to Khorassan, Jagatai, Bahrein, or Yezd. There is strife everywhere. The princes have been thrown out everywhere. Mirza Jahan Shah was slain by Uzun Hasan Beg, and Sultan Abu Said was poisoned; Uzun Hasan Beg tried to rule in Shiraz, but that land would not recognise him. And Yadigar Muhammad will not join him, for he is afraid. And there is no other way. And to go by way of Mecca would mean to take the Moslem faith; it is because of their faith that Christians do not go to Mecca, for there they would be converted to Islam. And to live in Hindustan would mean to spend all that I have, because everything is expensive here; alone I spend on food two and a half *altins* a day. As for wine or mead, I have drunk none of it here.



Malik-at-Tujjâr took two Indian towns that sent pirates to the Indian Sea. And he seized seven princes and their treasures: a pack-load of sapphires, and another of diamonds and rubies, and 100 pack-loads of valuable goods. As for other goods, his army took untold quantities of them. And he besieged the town for two years with an army of 200,000, and 100 elephants and 300 camels. And at *Kurban Bayram*—Russian St. Peter's Day—Malik-at-Tujjâr arrived at Bidar with his army. And the Sultan sent 10 viziers to meet him 10 *kos* from the city, one *kos* being 10 versts. And each vizier had with him an army 10,000 strong, and 10 elephants in armour.

And at Malik-at-Tujjâr's house, 500 men sit at table every day. And three viziers sit down to the meals with him and each vizier has 50 men and 100 boyars attached to him. Ma-



lik-at-Tujjâr has 2000 horses in his stables, and 1000 saddled horses stand ready day and night, and besides there are 100 elephants in the stables. By night his court is guarded by 100 men in armour and 20 trumpeters and 10 drummers, and two men beat each of the 10 big tambourines.

And the Nizam-ul-Mulk, Melik Khan, and Farkhad Khan took three big towns, having with them an army 100,000 strong and 50 elephants. They also took a huge quantity of precious stones of every kind, which stones and sapphires and diamonds they bought for Malik-at-Tujjâr; he forbade the jewellers to sell them to the merchants who had arrived at Bidar on the Day of the Assumption of the Holy Mother of God.

The Sultan goes forth to amuse himself on Thursdays and



Tuesdays, and is accompanied by three viziers. And his brother goes forth every Monday, with his mother and sister. And 2000 women go forth on horseback or in golden litters. And they are preceded by 100 spare horses in golden harness, and many people go with them on foot; and there also go forth 12 viziers, and 50 elephants covered with cloth. And on each elephant ride four men, naked save for a loin-cloth. And naked women follow them on foot, carrying water for drinking and washing, and no one borrows water from the others.

Malik-at-Tujjâr set out from the city of Bidar to reduce the Indians on Sheik Ala-uddin's memorial day, that is, during the Russian Feast of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, and he had an army of 50,000. And the Sultan sent an



army of his own 50,000 strong, and three viziers with another 30,000; and with them went 100 elephants in armour, with castles, and on each elephant rode four men with arquebuses. Malik-at-Tujjâr had set out to reduce the Indian kingdom of Vijayanagar⁷⁹.

And the Prince of Vijayanagar had 300 elephants and an army of 100,000, and 50,000 horses. The Sultan left the city of Bidar in the eighth month after Easter Sunday, and 26 Moslem and six Indian viziers went with him. And from the Sultan's court there went an army of 100,000 horsemen and 200,000 foot soldiers, and 300 elephants in armour, bearing castles, and 100 ferocious beasts, each held by two chains. And from the court of the Sultan's brother there went 100,000 horsemen and 100,000 foot soldiers, and



100 elephants clad in armour. And from the court of Mal Khan there went 20,000 horsemen and 60,000 foot soldiers, and 20 elephants in fighting array. And with Beder Khan and his brother there went 30,000 horsemen and 100,000 foot soldiers, and 25 elephants in fighting array, with castles. And from the court of Sul Khan there went 10,000 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers, and 10 elephants bearing castles. And with Wazir Khan there went 15,000 horsemen and 30,000 foot soldiers, and 15 elephants in fighting array. And from the court of Kutar Khan there went 15,000 horsemen and 40,000 foot soldiers, and 10 elephants. And with each vizier there went 10,000, and with some even 15,000 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers. And with the Autonomos⁸⁰ there went an army of 40,000 horse-



men and 100,000 foot soldiers, and 40 elephants in armour, each elephant carrying four men armed with harquebuses. And with the Sultan there went 26 viziers, and each vizier had with him an army of 10,000 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers; and some of the viziers had 15,000 horsemen and 30,000 foot soldiers each. And the four Indian grand viziers had each an army of 40,000 horsemen and 100,000 foot soldiers. And the Sultan was angry with the Indians because too few had set out with him, and he added 20,000 foot soldiers, 2000 horsemen, and 20 elephants. Such is the strength of the Moslem Sultan of India; the Mohammedan faith still holds good. As for the true faith, God alone knows it, and the true faith is to believe in one God, and to invoke His name in purity in every pure place.



On the fifth Easter Sunday, I made up my mind to leave for Rus. I set out from the city of Bidar a month before the Moslem *Ulu Bayram*, according to the faith of Mohammed, the Prophet of God. As for the great Christian feast—the Resurrection of Christ—I know not when to keep it, and I fasted with the Moslems, and broke my fast when they broke theirs. I kept Easter at Gulbarga, 20 *kos* from Bidar.

The Sultan reached Malik-at-Tujjâr with his army on the 15th day after *Ulu Bayram*, at Gulbarga. And they failed in the war; they took an Indian town, but lost many men and spent much of their treasury. And the Indian Governor is very powerful and has a big army, and he resides on a mountain at Vijayanagar. And his city is very large, it is surrounded by three moats, and a river flows through it; on the one side of



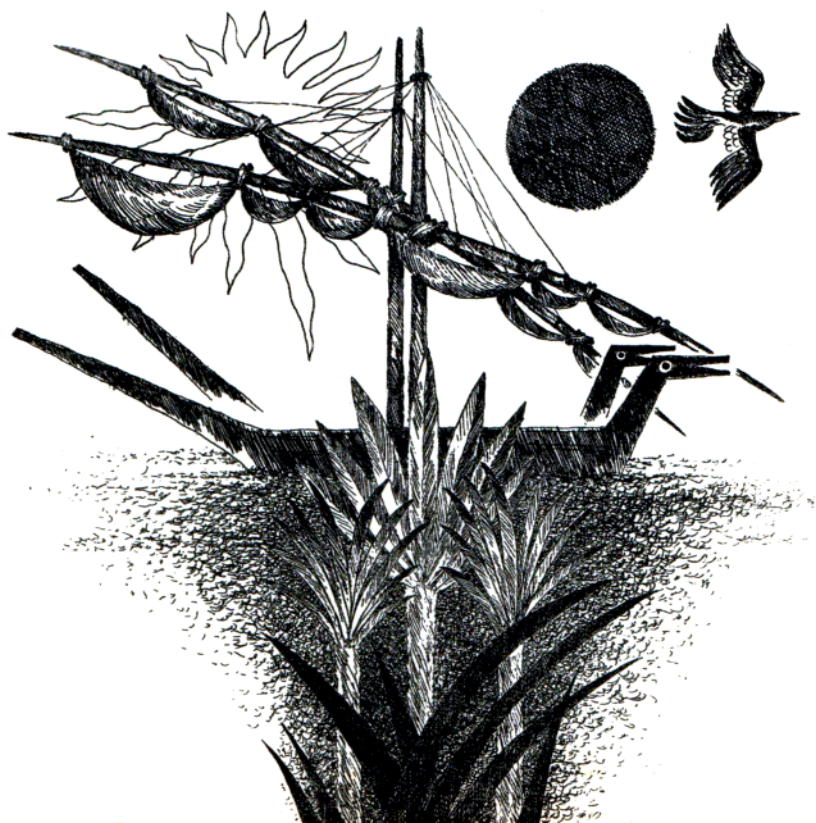
the city is a wild jungle, and on the other side lies a very beautiful valley, good for anything. The other side cannot be reached from anywhere because the road leads through the city, nor can the city be taken from anywhere because of the high mountain and the wild jungle and the prickly brushwood. The army held the city invested for a month, and some men died of thirst, and many men died of starvation and lack of water; and although they saw water, they could not get at it from any quarter. And the Indian town was taken by Khoja Malik-at-Tujjâr, who did it by force, fighting the town day and night; his army had nothing to eat or drink for 20 days, besieging the town with cannons. And 5000 of his picked soldiers fell. And when the town was taken, 20,000 men and women were killed, and another 20,000—adults and children—were taken captive. The cap-



tives were sold at 10 *tangas* each, and some at five *tangas*, and children at two *tangas* each. But no treasure was found. As for the big city, they failed to take it.

From Gulbarga I went to Kulur⁸¹, and that is where cornelian is mined and worked, and sent to all parts of the world. Three hundred diamond-workers live at Kulur; they adorn weapons. And I stayed there for five months, and went thence to Golconda⁸², which has a very large market. And thence I went to Gulbarga, and from Gulbarga to Sheik Ala-uddin and from Sheik Ala-uddin to Kamendria, and from Kamendria to Kynarias, and from Kynarias to Suri; and from Suri I went to Dabhol, a harbour on the great Indian Sea.

Dabhol is a very large city, and people from the whole coast of India and Ethiopia come there. And there I, Afa-



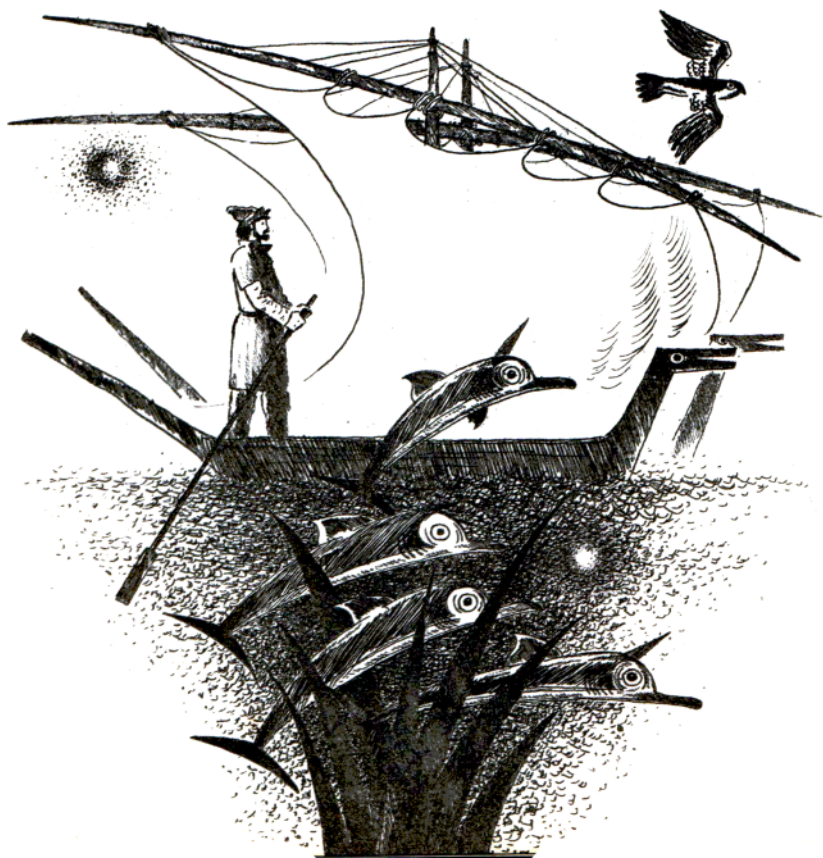
nasy, a humble servant of Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, pondered over the Christian faith, the Baptism of Christ, the fasts established by the Holy Fathers, and the apostolic commandments, and I longed to go to Rus. And having boarded a *dabba* and struck a bargain on the fare, I paid two gold pieces for the passage to Hormuz.

I boarded the ship at Dabhol three months before Easter Day—the Moslem Fast. And I sailed on the *dabba* across the sea for a month, seeing nothing, and it was not until the second month that I sighted the mountains of Ethiopia. Then all those on board exclaimed: “O God, it seems that we are doomed to perish here!”

And I spent five days in the land of Ethiopia. By the mercy of God, no evil befell us; we distributed much rice and pep-



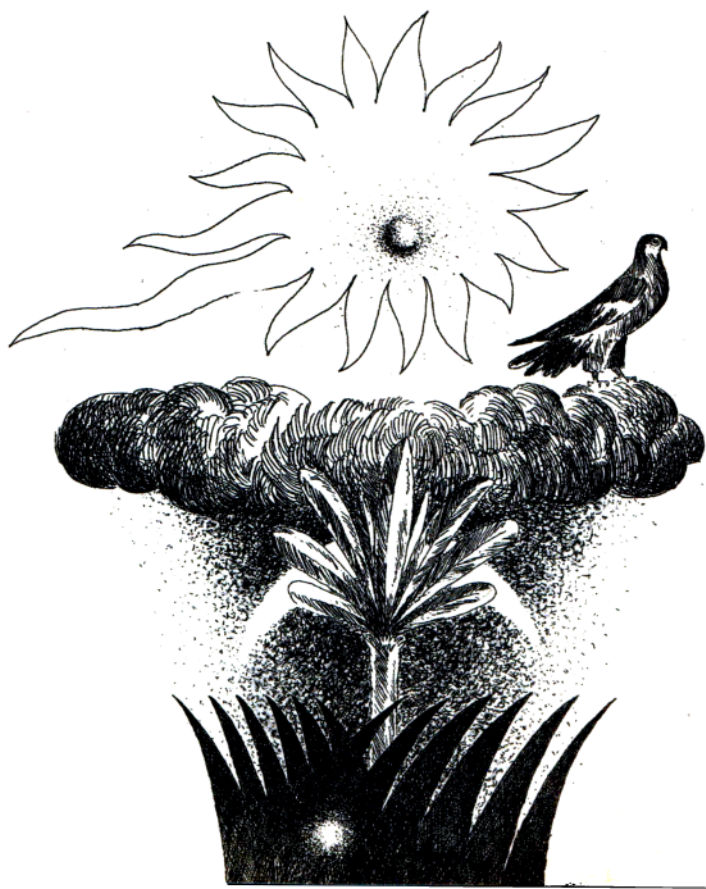
per and loaves of bread among the Ethiopians, and they did not plunder the ships. Thence I sailed in 12 days to Muscat, and there kept my sixth Easter. And I sailed to Hormuz in 9 days, and spent 20 days there. From Hormuz I journeyed to Lar, and spent 3 days there. From Lar I journeyed to Shiraz⁸³ in 12 days, and spent 7 days there. And from Shiraz I journeyed to Aberkuh⁸⁴ in 15 days, and spent 10 days there. And from Aberkuh I journeyed to Yezd in 9 days, and spent 8 days there. And from Yezd I journeyed to Isfahan⁸⁵ in 5 days, and spent 6 days there. And from Isfahan I journeyed to Kashan and spent 5 days there. And from Kashan I journeyed to Kum⁸⁶, and from Kum to Savah⁸⁷. And from Savah I journeyed to Sultaniya⁸⁸. And from Sultaniya I journeyed to Tabriz⁸⁹. And from Tabriz I went to Hasan Beg's⁹⁰ camp, and



stayed for 10 days there, because I could not continue my journey. Hasan Beg had despatched an army of 40,000 against the Turkish (Sultan), and they took Sivas: they also took and burnt Tokat⁹¹, took Amasya⁹², and sacked many villages. And fighting, the army marched on Karaman⁹³. And from the camp I journeyed to Erzincan⁹⁴, and from Erzincan to Trebizond⁹⁵.

And I arrived at Trebizond on the day of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, and stayed there for five days. And having boarded a ship, I struck a bargain on the fare—one gold piece for the passage to Kaffa⁹⁶; and I was to pay a toll of one gold piece at Kaffa.

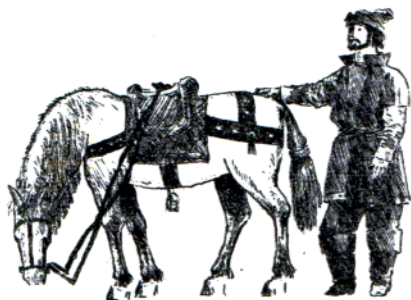
At Trebizond the *Subasi*⁹⁷ and the Pasha caused me much harm; they took all my luggage to their town on the mountain, and searched it thoroughly; they stole all the fine things



that they found while seeking for papers, for I had come from Hasan Beg's camp.

By the mercy of God, I reached the third sea, the Black Sea, or Sea of Stambul in Persia. It took me five days to sail with a fair wind to Vonada⁹⁸, but there a strong northerly wind stopped us, and made us turn back to Trebizond. And we lay at anchor at Platana⁹⁹ for 15 days because of the strong and fierce wind. We put to sea from Platana twice, but the fierce wind checked us. O God! I had nearly crossed the sea when the wind drove us to Balaklava¹⁰⁰, and thence to Gurzuf¹⁰¹, where we lay at anchor for five days.

By the mercy of God, I arrived at Kaffa nine days before the Fast of Advent. O God, my Creator! By the mercy of God, I have crossed three seas. The rest God alone knows, God the Protector alone wots.



NOTES

¹ Sea of Derbent, or Sea of Khwalis, the Caspian Sea.

² Indian Sea, or of Hindustan, the Indian Ocean.

³ Sea of Stambul, the Black Sea.

⁴ The Golden-Domed Cathedral of the Redeemer, a cathedral in Tver (now Kalinin). The stone cathedral which Nikitin mentions here was built in the late 12th century.

⁵ Mikhail Borisovich, Grand Duke of Tver (1461-1485).

⁶ Gennady, Bishop of Tver.

⁷ Monastery of the Holy Trinity, a monastery in the town of Kalyazin, founded by Father-Superior Macarius, whom Nikitin went to see.

⁸ The reference is to one of the churches of the Kalyazin Monastery, named after Boris and Gleb, sons of Vladimir the Saint, Grand Duke of Kiev, who were canonised by the Russian Church.

⁹ Nikitin refers to Ivan III Vasilyevich.

¹⁰ Vasily Papin was the ambassador sent by Ivan III to the court of Farrukh Yasar, Shah of Shirvan, a north-western region of Azerbaijan.

¹¹ Sarai, capital of the Golden Horde.

¹² Berekezan, a settlement in the Volga delta, north of Astrakhan.

¹³ Buzan, a branch of the lower Volga, running into the Akhtubia.

¹⁴ Khan Kasim, the first Khan of Astrakhan (from 1466).

¹⁵ Bugun, a shoal in the mouth of the Volga.

¹⁶ Derbent, a town on the west coast of the Caspian, known since the 6th century.

¹⁷ Tarki, or Tarkhu, was a fortress on the Daghestan coast of the Caspian Sea.

¹⁸ The Kaitaks inhabited a region and principality of that name in western Daghestan, to the north-west of Derbent.

¹⁹ Shemakha, a town in Shirvan, now a district centre of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.

²⁰ Chapakur, a village in the North Iranian region of Mazandaran, a narrow strip of land between the south coast of the Caspian and the Elburz Range.

²¹ Sari, a town in Mazandaran, 15 miles to the south of the Caspian.

²² Amul, the largest town in Mazandaran.

²³ Demavend, a mountain massif and peak, the highest point of the Elburz Range (18,381 ft.).

²⁴ Rai, one of the greatest cities of medieval Iran. Its ruins lie five miles to the south-east of Teheran.

²⁵ Kashan, Nain, Sirjan and Tarum, Iranian towns.

²⁶ *Batman*, a weight varying locally.

²⁷ Lar, a town in southern Iran. Nikitin visited it twice.

²⁸ By "Bandar" (lit., "harbour") Nikitin means Old Hormuz (see next note).

²⁹ Hormuz is an island and old seaport in the Persian Gulf. Old Hormuz stood on the coast.

³⁰ *Dabba*, local name of a sea-going ship of that period.

³¹ Muscat, seaport on the Oman coast of Arabia.

³² It is not clear what place Nikitin calls "Dega". Perhaps he refers to Diu (Dvipa), a port near the Kathiawar peninsula, western India.

³³ Cambay, a port on a gulf of the same name.

³⁴ Chaul, a harbour on the Malabar coast, south of Bombay.

³⁵ Pali, a town to the east of Chaul.

³⁶ Junnar, a town to the east of Bombay.

³⁷ Asad Khan, probably the Governor of Junnar under Muhammad Shah III. A

Moslem state ruled by the Bahmani Dynasty was established in the Deccan in the mid-14th century. At the time of Nikitin's stay in India, the Bahmani throne was held by Muhammad Shah III. But the virtual ruler was, on behalf of the Shah, his Minister, or Vizier, Muhammad Gavan, who bore the title of *Malik-at-Tujjar* (lit., "King of Merchants"). Nikitin uses it throughout instead of the Minister's real name.

³⁸ *Kāfir* ("unbeliever") was the term applied by the Moslem conquerors to non-Moslems. Nikitin uses it with reference to Hindus only.

³⁹ Khorassan, a region in north-east Iran. In the Middle Ages it was considered to extend from the Desht-i-Kavir Desert in the west to the River Amu Darya and the Badakhshan Mountains in the east, and from the Kara Kum Desert in the north to the Hindu Kush Range and the Seistan Region in the south.

⁴⁰ Jagatai, name applied to Central Asia in the 13th-15th centuries.

⁴¹ *Tatna*, a plant from which a heady beverage was made in India.

⁴² *Khicri*, an Indian dish of rice, with ghee and seasoning.

⁴³ Bidar, a town on the Deccan Plateau, 62 miles to the north-west of Hyderabad. Kulungir and Gulbarga are also Deccan towns.

⁴⁴ *Kos* is a measure of distance, varying locally. Nikitin holds one *kos* to average 10 versts (6½ miles).

⁴⁵ Alland, a town 28 miles to the north-east of Gulbarga.

⁴⁶ Feast of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, October 1st.

⁴⁷ Actually Bidar was only the capital of the Bahmanids and not of the whole of Moslem India.

⁴⁸ Melik Khan and Farkhad Khan were generals under Muhammad Shah III, the Bahmanid ruler.

⁴⁹ In the Orthodox Church, the Fast of Advent lasts from November 14th to December 24th.

⁵⁰ Khoja Yusuf Khorassani, the Moslem name assumed by Nikitin.

⁵¹ *But*, an idol.

⁵² Nikitin probably means the numerous sects and ramifications of Hinduism.

⁵³ Parvat, a group of temples on the right bank of the Kastna, 108 miles to the south-east of Hyderabad.

⁵⁴ *Sbeshekani*, a small silver coin.

⁵⁵ The comparison refers to the outstretched arm of the equestrian statue of the Byzantine emperor Justinian.

⁵⁶ *Ulu Bayram* (lit., "Great Feast"), one of the two principal Moslem feasts.

⁵⁷ In the 15th century Dabhol was an important trading port on the Malabar coast, 81 miles to the south of Bombay.

⁵⁸ In the 13th and 14th centuries Calicut was a famous seaport on the Malabar coast of India.

⁵⁹ It is not clear what country Nikitin means by "Shabait".

⁶⁰ Pegu, a region in southern Burma, on the lower Irrawaddy.

⁶¹ Chin and Machin, names usually applied to China by Moslem peoples in the Middle Ages. Nikitin uses them for South China.

⁶² By "Cathay" Nikitin means North China.

⁶³ *Alacha*, a Persian fabric of twisted silk and cotton threads.

⁶⁴ *Adrak*, a kind of ginger.

⁶⁵ "High mountain," Adam's Peak in Ceylon, where there is a depression shaped like a huge human footprint. According to one legend, it was left by Adam.

⁶⁶ *Tanga*, a silver coin varying locally in weight and value.

⁶⁷ Raichur, a town to the south-west of Hyderabad.

⁶⁸ *Pochka*, an old Russian weight for precious stones, about 10 carats.

⁶⁹ *Kani*, a small coin, 1/64 of a *tanga* (see note 66).

⁷⁰ It is not clear what town Nikitin refers to by "Kain".

⁷¹ *Sagadak*, complete equipment of a mounted soldier.

⁷² Bahrein, a group of islands in the Persian Gulf.

⁷³ Jidda, an Arabian harbour on the Red Sea.

⁷⁴ Gilan, a region in north-west Iran.

⁷⁵ Homs, ancient Emesa, a town in Syria.

⁷⁶ Sivas, (*Gr.* Sebaste), a town on the River Kizil Irmak, in the eastern part of Asia Minor.

⁷⁷ Walachia, old name of Rumania.

⁷⁸ Podolia, a Russian region on the upper Dniester.

⁷⁹ Vijayanagar, a big city in South India, one-time capital of a large feudal state.

⁸⁰ Autonomos (*Gr.* "autocrat"), a term apparently referring to the ruler of Vijayanagar.

⁸¹ Kulur, a diamond mine in the Raichur area, south-west of Hyderabad.

⁸² Golconda, a town to the south-east of Gulbarga.

⁸³ Shiraz, main town of the South Iranian region of Fars.

⁸⁴ Aberkuh, a town in northern Fars, to the south-west of Yazd.

⁸⁵ Isfahan, a town in central Iran.

⁸⁶ Kum, an Iranian town to the south of Teheran.

⁸⁷ Savah, a town to the north-west of Kum, Iran.

⁸⁸ Sultaniya, a town in northern Iran, on the road linking Tabriz to the capital.

⁸⁹ Tabriz, a town in Iranian Azerbaijan.

⁹⁰ Hasan Beg headed a confederation of Turkoman Ak Koyunlu ("White Ram") tribes.

⁹¹ Tokat, a town to the north of Sivas, Asia Minor.

⁹² Amasya, a town on the River Yesil Irmak, to the north-west of Sivas (see note 76).

⁹³ Karaman, a Turkoman state in the south-eastern part of Asia Minor. It existed from the 13th to the 15th century.

⁹⁴ Erzincan, a town in the Armenian uplands, to the east of Sivas.

⁹⁵ Trebizond, a town on the south coast of the Black Sea.

⁹⁶ Kaffa, present-day Feodosia (Theodosia), a seaport town on the coast of the Crimea.

⁹⁷ *Subasi*, a feudal lord and military leader in Ottoman Turkey.

⁹⁸ Vonada, a cape on the south coast of the Black Sea, west of Trebizond.

⁹⁹ Platana, a small town and harbour on the south coast of the Black Sea.

¹⁰⁰ Balaklava, a port on the south-west coast of the Crimea.

¹⁰¹ Gurzuf, a settlement (now a health resort) on the south coast of the Crimea.

AFTERWORD

Vast distances and the highest mountain ranges in the world separate the Soviet Union from India. But since olden times the peoples of the two great countries have lived in friendship, showing a keen interest in each other. More than once over the centuries Russian travellers, scientists, writers and artists have visited the far-away southern country washed by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. In their diaries and recollections we find many a heart-felt comment, full of sympathy for India and her people.

Afanasy Nikitin was the first Russian to reach India.

The noted traveller was born in Tver (now Kalinin), an old Russian town situated where two small rivers, the Tvertsa and the Tmaka, join the Volga. It is first mentioned in the chronicles of the early 13th century. In the latter half of the 15th century the town was the capital of the sovereign Principality of Tver, one of the numerous independent principalities into which Russia was divided in those days. Few Russian towns could vie with it in population or wealth. Nor did it lose its importance as a major trading centre when, in the late 15th century, it became part of the centralised Russian state.

There was little in the outward appearance of Tver to distinguish it from other Russian towns. Its central part was taken up by a kremlin, or citadel, where stood the Golden-Domed Cathedral of the Redeemer, the Prince's palace, the houses of his retainers, and other buildings. Outside the kremlin walls lived traders, artisans and other townspeople. There was also an arcade there, where visiting merchants put their goods on sale.

The more enterprising of the Tver merchants engaged in foreign trade. In the 15th century Russian merchants were frequent visitors to the West European, Middle Eastern and Central Asian markets. Afanasy Nikitin, too, seems to have travelled far and wide, for in his notes he compares Russia to the Crimea, Georgia, Turkey, Walachia and Podolia as someone well familiar with those regions.

One day Hasan Beg, Ambassador of the ruler of the Khanate of Shirvan, arrived at the court of Ivan III, Grand Duke of Muscovy. He brought valuable gifts with him. Ivan III sent his own ambassador, Vasily Papin of Tver, to the court of Shirvan. Hearing of this, Nikitin and some other merchants set out for Shirvan to trade there. They sailed down the Volga on two ships. And thus began a great voyage whose story has come down to us as recorded by Nikitin and published in this book.

After many dramatic adventures Nikitin found himself in Baku. From there he set out across the whole of Persia for the seaport town of Hormuz, one of the biggest trading centres of the East. The description of the journey through Persia is extremely laconic. Nikitin confines himself to little more than a list of the places which he chanced to visit on his way. His notes on the voyage from Hormuz on are more detailed and colourful.

While in Persia, Nikitin heard that no horses were bred in India and that they were therefore very expensive in that country, or so rumour had it. This led him to decide on a voyage to India. He bought a fine horse and with it boarded a *dabba*, a small sea-going ship. He sailed to the coast of Hindustan, hoping to sell his horse there and to buy goods that were sought after in Russia. It took great courage to venture on a voyage across the stormy Indian Ocean aboard so frail a craft. Six weeks later the *dabba* carrying Nikitin put in

at Chaul, on the Malabar coast of India. "And that is where the land of India lies," Nikita recorded in his journal.

Nikitin's description of what he saw in India is striking evidence of his powers of observation and his ability to discern the typical aspects in the way of life of a people he had never known before. He not only kept a strict account of facts, but also analysed them, drawing interesting parallels.

During his wanderings in India Nikitin saw many towns and villages of that great country. He visited seaports on the western coast, crossed the Ghats and reached the heart of the Deccan Plateau. His notes tell us about Junnar and Gulbarga, Bidar and Golconda, the market in Alland and the diamond mines at Raichur, the temples of Parvat and the fortress of Vijayanagar. They also furnish information on places which he did not visit, such as Ceylon, Pegu, etc., but which he knew about from what others had told him.

No aspect of life in India, no detail worthy of note, escaped Nikitin's attention. His notes describe the outward appearance of Indians, their clothing and food, the cost of living, rites, customs, caste distinctions and interrelations, legends, and so on. He recorded everything with a dispassionate pen, making, however, interesting comments. He gives a detailed description of the Sultan's solemn processions, of his untold riches and dazzling splendour. On the other hand, he was the only traveller of that time who saw the shady side of the opulence and fabulous luxury of the life led by the Sultan and his courtiers. "The countrymen are very poor, but the boyars are rich and live in luxury," we read in the notes. This alone places him above many other authors who have described 15th-century India.

Nikitin spent almost three years in India. But his love of his homeland urged him back to Rus, to his own people. "May God protect the Russian land! There is no land in the world like it, although the boyars in the Russian land are unjust. May the Russian land be well-ordered, and may there be justice there." These lines indicate Nikitin's deep patriotism, and show him as a man whose views were highly progressive for his time.

It took Nikitin many long months to make his way to the port of Dabhol on the Malabar coast, from where he left for his own country. His homeward route lay through Muscat and Hormuz, across Persia to Asia Minor, and from there to the Crimean port of Kaffa (modern Feodosia), where there was a large Russian settlement. He never reached his home town of Tver, however; according to a chronicler, he died before reaching Smolensk.

That is how Afanasy Nikitin's "voyage beyond three seas" ended. His notes, written in the 15th century, or almost 500 years ago, still stimulate us by the frankness and sincerity of the writer's comments, and amaze us by the abundance of enlightening data on the Indians' way of life. They show the sources of Russian-Indian friendship, and are testimony to the depth of that friendship.

REQUEST TO READERS

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ХОЖДЕНИЕ ЗА ТРИ МОРЯ АФАНАСИЯ НИКИТИНА

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